

The Old Town on the River

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THE OLD TOWN
ON THE RIVER



A Pictured Poem

A LITTLE BOOK OF VISIONS
B Y
F L O R A B U L L O C K

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MESSRS. TYSON AND RICE
DRAWINGS BY HARRIET HERSHY

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THE IVY PRESS
LINCOLN NEBRASKA

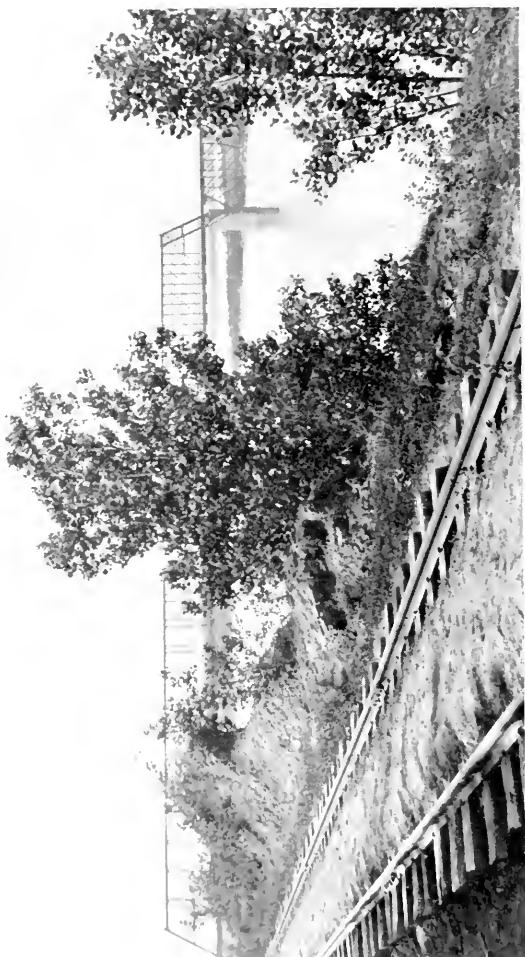
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Arranged and Printed by Harry S. Staff at
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NOT THE Old Town historical, social, nor commercial, but the Old Town beautiful, is the theme of this little Book. Traditions may best be told by those who helped make them. But all sojourners are privileged to enjoy the beauties of the fairest region in Nebraska.

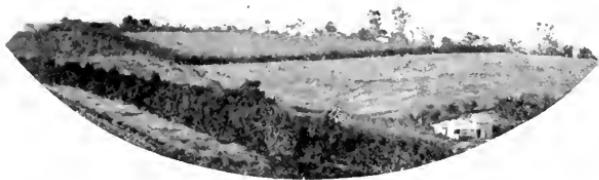
A PART of these sketches and verses were contributed to the columns of the Courier, of Lincoln, in the years 1899 and 1900.



The River's Enemy

Oh, I would bring you
A draught of this beauty,
You who sit crouched
By the high city wall!
I am a monarch,
And this is my booty.
To keep, I would share it,
To hoard, I would bear it
Away where the shut-in ones
Struggle and fall.

You see but patches
And shreds of the skies;
I own a dome
Of that exquisite blue.
Mine is the west
Where the red sun dies,
The east where he rises,
That chief of surprises,
To smile on my kingdom,
And diamond the dew.



The Green Things Growing

Poor, and a beggar,
I claim as mine own
That sweep of the river,
Broad miles of the hills;
For over them often
My spirit hath flown.
The wild flowers blowing,
The green things growing,
For me the whole woodland
Its perfume distills.

God giveth the earth
To those who most love it.
O ye of the City,
Speed forth from your gates,
And stand on the hill-tops
In wonder above it!
A song's in the air;
The earth everywhere
Radiant in glory,
Your worship awaits!



In the Night and the Rain

PROLOGUE



AITH THE PILGRIM:

"What manner of place
is the Old Town?"

Saith the Interpreter:
"It is a lealy bower,
a green allurement for
birds, an imbibor of
showers.

"It is a picture that
cannot be painted, a
poem that cannot be
written, a song that
cannot be sung.

"It is a hospitable inn for freighters, a relic for antiquarians.

"In the morning it is a refresher of the sun.

"At noontide it is an oak-tree for the earth.

"In the evening it is a Dutch Lullaby."

Saith the Pilgrim: "What manner of Folk are they
that dwell in the Old Town?"

Saith the Interpreter: "They are a mystery unto
themselves. For they know not whence they come
nor whither they go, nor can they truly tell what
they now are.

"They are servants, not masters; even their food and
their raiment cometh from the Bountiful Giver.

"All of which doth but approve them the
descendants of Adam and kin to
all other Folk in the
Wide World."



Just at a Bend of the River

THE OLD TOWN . . .

Where hills are fairest in splendor,
And brightest of skies look down,
Just at a bend of the River,
There lieth an Old Town.



HERE are Old Towns and Old Towns, even in fair young Nebraska;—little burgs that the pioneers with unquestioning courage set along the great River in the days when few suspected that it was the Jordan of a promised land.

Rather was it deemed a Nile to a Sahara. But the conquerors came and deployed along the stream with their faces to the west. If you ramble where they paused, be not surprised if you stumble unawares upon rotted boards or tumbling bricks in the grass. For some of the Old Towns did not survive. Their records are kept in the memories of pioneers or in yellowed documents and newspapers. Others of these frontier citadels had vitality enough to live, to thrive, and eventually to grow old gracefully, so that their names have become a charm, "known in sundry lands." The great army and the rear guard of

conquest passed them by. The currents of Life left them almost as sandbars on the shores of Time. They seem content to stay where they have drifted and watch the world whirl by. A few have fallen not entirely out of the race. Yet like proud old dames, they ape not the fashions of the young folk, but sit and smile on their gayety, keep watch of the girth of their own oak-trees, and maintain sweetly that it is no misfortune to be old, when to be old is to be beautiful.

Nebraska City is known as perhaps the prettiest town in the state whose name it bears. It may be that the Old Settler has forgotten, and the stranger who wanders along the streets and beside the dun-colored water may not discover, the rare beauty and charm of the place. But come with me to a high aerie above the tree-tops, above the gray roofs and steeples, watch the Old Town as it basks peacefully in the softened sunshine among its venerable oaks, know it in its different moods and varying seasons. There will always be, then, though you may travel far and view the splendors of the earth, a little picture in your memory,—well worth keeping,—of a quiet, dreamy city, one-fourth house-roofs, and three-fourths tree-tops, set on gentle slopes, and with face to the Morning.

But you will not see the glory of the Morning if you watch from your low earth dwelling. You

must betake yourself to some high look-out. The temples of Phoebus are set on the hills. Behold! He comes up over the River, looking drowsy, and jaded and worn from his long, unrefreshed night journey. (You may doubt this, but indeed if you arise early, you will learn that it is very true). Then his glance falls upon the Old Town, and eagerly he quaffs the foamy bowl of mist brewed over night on the river and in the low vales between the hills, quaffs it as rich red wine. Soon his clouded face grows



A Repose all Nature's Own



A Little Slope, with a Leaning Fence

clearer; and the Old Town turns toward him, like a Nebraska sunflower, gathering brightness as it worships.

Then too, if you walk low streets, you may think that the glory which rose beyond your neighbor's house sets in the slough behind his barn. But it is really true, as you have read in poetry, that the Life-giver sinks to his rest far away among the hills. Often and often he wraps the Old Town in a wonderful cloud of red dust of gold ere he bids farewell. And seldom does he leave without rending the cloud-drifts for a last smile and caress. Golden Nebraska sunsets! —to see one once is to wonder; to see them day after day is to feel that God is good.

But the beauties of the Old Town are not reserved wholly for him who knows it from a bird's point of view. As a city of trees it has charms for every wayfarer, especially for one who has erewhile sojourned on the treeless plains of the west. It is hard to credit the Old Settler who tells you that these great oaks and elms, these spreading maples and stately walnuts were planted by the pioneers. One would think rather that Nature had the hills all in readiness for the coming of the Paleface, that his home might grow up under the trees, not the trees around his home. Yet the Builders so wisely supplemented Nature that the Old Town has long been a beacon in a wilderness. How pathetic, in



City Library and a Picture that is Called a Street



reality, is the thought of the little fellow, born among the sand-hills, who told his Sunday-school teacher that Moses must have lived on a tree-claim, or he would never have seen a burning bush.

The Old Town is only a tree-claim grown venerable.

The sight of the great mass of green leaves and broad trunks would be a holy feast to the hungry ones of the sand-hills. But it must also be a delight to every lover of nature, and every artist. The grouping and coloring seem unsurpassable, and often a camera will secure a picture



worthy to hang in the salon. There are broad, level avenues where trees separate just enough overhead to show a crescent of blue sky; great landmarks on corners, that you come to know as a friendly greeting when you pass by them; and on one side street you will surely notice a sturdy old Middle-of-the-Roader, who stands, a lesson in independence, to every passer-by. The trees recognize no caste among men, for the mightiest oak may shelter the humblest hut; and cottage and mansion alike has each a group of noble friends.



A
Primitive
Workshop

None but a plainsman who has lived where straight, level streets stretch away into nowhere,—unless it be to the place where, as someone has put it, "you can see day after tomorrow coming up over the prairie,"—can appreciate the pictures, with background and foreground, that the Old Town Folk call streets. Many a road that leads to the east affords a glimpse of the River, and the blue-shadowed bluffs beyond; this dip in the road looks down into a shady dell, and that, to a bridge over a miniature gorge. That little slope, beside a leaning fence and overhanging branches, with a bit of the River far beyond, must surely be a scene strayed from some New England hillside. Even on Main street it is hard to catch the spirit of barter and trade, for the hazy atmosphere of perpetual afternoon hangs over the valley at the foot of the long descent. But the people you meet are nineteenth century Folk, and you may forget that you are in an Old Town. Perchance the Great Tinkling Limited will pass, and you will regain the proper perspective. Electric cars? Pray let no modern suggest it! It would completely spoil the Old Town.

But the Spirit of Progress has already committed well-nigh unforgivable sins even here in a land of romance. It has mocked at ancient relics and broken to fragments the hieroglyphics of the past. Strange anomaly! The Old Town has a



A Sloping Main Street

clear, mathematical, India-rubber street nomenclature, which might be the envy of all uninspired Moses striving to lead other cities out of a wilderness of errors and alphabets. The poetic names of a race that may itself become only a name in history, were fittingly bestowed by the Builders. But Kiowa, Nemaha, Pawnee, Otoe, and the rest, were thrust out of their tepees to make room for the Idea of the Paleface. We have no time for romance, say you? We are too busy with our mills and shops, our stores and offices, our schools and churches and societies? We are proud of our industries and success, and are in as much of a hurry as the rest of the world?

It may be, and it may be well if it is so. But to those who gaze day after day from a high look-out above the Old Town, it is a place of visions, a quiet, dreamy city, one-fourth house-roofs and three-fourths tree-tops, clinging to the hills just at a bend of the River.



Courtesy J. Sterling Morton

Painting in Public Library



HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

Up hill, down dale,
Through darkest hollows;
Where one has gone before,
Many another follows.



ANDERING Indian trails that lie hidden in the grass, that have been filled with the drifting leaves of many autumns—what stories they might tell! Paths beaten so hard and deep that not all the rushing torrents of fifty summers, nor the thaws of as many springtimes, have effaced them. Perhaps you may discover one as you ride along in your cushioned carriage, for the Paleface has often followed where the Red man marked the way. You may wonder to what happy hunting-ground, grassy council-seat, or primitive workshop it might lead, if you could trace it. But corn has tasseled and wheat has waved on too many hillsides, and the wigwams of the Palefaces have clustered too closely on prairie and plain. Yet few of the reminders of our strange Age of Fable kindle the imagination more than



an old Indian trail, winding among the grass, and leading—whither? . . . How sternly the narrow track speaks of the loneliness of man in this world, and the mystery of his end. It is something the same with the highways of the Pale-faces. But they are more spacious; they suggest companionship, and might tell tales, also, if tongues were granted. They are best when the River and the hills that bulwark it

have thwarted the men of the rod and chain. Your section-line road may lie never so pleasantly between hedgerows and great old trees, beside majestic corn-fields and tall banks of sunflowers; but it will never yield the subtle enjoyment, the pleasurable sense of expectation, that comes to one who follows a winding path, as Nature decrees. Then every bend or turn is a question-mark, a speculation in futures. It is a

special blessing if you are a stranger and must needs ask your way, for then you may come upon some old farmer, an ancient mariner of the prairies, who will stop his nag with a slow jerk, and, after deliberation, will tell you that your true course lies this way, then that way, then past a white house, then across, and over and beyond. How it stimulates your bewilderment!

Roads lead out from the Old Town to many a spot that is fair. They will conduct you past venerable orchards,—small need have we to wonder at our great Foremother; between fields where the rustling corn grows tall and stately;



A Little White Mill in the Wildwood



upon level avenues under the shadows of lofty walnut trees; close to a white mill in the wild-wood; over red bridges, where you may look down into a quiet pool, or mimic cataract; until at last you come out upon a high bluff where the wind blows free from the River, and you can view the "Big Muddy" in all its majesty,—a fitting climax of your pilgrimage. The road that does not afford you at least a glimpse of the old River may be pleasing, but it is like an unfinished picture, a sonata robbed of its final chord. Once, it is told me, there was a veritable River road high on the bluffs. But it has gone the way to oblivion with the Indian trail, and lies buried beneath corn-fields; or perhaps it may be that the River wooed and won it, and bore it away in the night.

What an impressionist is Nature! She does not favor every clime with her great exhibition pictures, canvasses adjudged the prize by all men. But her simple beauties, her lesser works of wonder, are everywhere in the world. Surely the Old Town has fared well at her gracious hands, partly because the builders of the city gave her aid. The River, a masterpiece in water colors, is the *chef d'oeuvre*, and the Hills are perfect in drawing and coloring. But her gallery is filled with sketches of smaller design, pictured poems that to see once is to remember always. There are turns in the road where the sunlight lies tangled with leaf shadows in your path, and the most beautiful blue of all is before you at the crest of the hill. The trees, sprung from wind-blown seed, are grouped with a repose all Nature's own. The dull gray roads of men are



A Walnut Drive



A Venerable Orchard Arbor Lodge

framed, where Nature has her way, in gorgeous settings,—flowers of purple, scarlet, and gold. Oh, she splashes color on her canvas as no disciple of hers would dare!

Well, to ride along such highways and byways is a true worship for a Sabbath afternoon. One would wish to keep on roaming. But when the twilight comes, like a beautiful gray angel, whose robe is silence and shadow, and whose breath is a soft hand on your brow, then it is good to turn your face back to the Old Town, feeling, as men of every kindred have felt, that the best road of all is the road that leads Home.





The Swirling Old Missouri

THE RIVER

Whirling and swirling, swift and strong,
O River, pause and answer me;—
What is the burden you bear along?

The River paused not, nor answered he.
Yet I caught one strain of his murmured song;
"I bear the Mountains down to the Sea."



FTER all, though the noble Red man perish from the earth and be "as a tale that is told," he will leave a precious legacy to the race of Palefaces; he may go to his happy hunting-grounds

with never a bend in his proud neck. The names that in his gladness or in his fear, with his unspoiled child instinct of description, he bestowed upon river and mountain are ours without prick of conscience. Yet truly we did borrow, like the new neighbor that we were. We sprinkled the picturesque names of these real Americans like salt from east to west, and from north to south, over almost every acre of our fair land. No return was required, but surely we must repay in recognition. One shudders to



A Landmark on a Corner

think what names might have befallen us otherwise. The seventeenth century Anglo-Saxons lacked the pictorial powers of the Red man. To their wondering gaze everything was New this or New that, or else for the sake of policy or man-glorification, it must be called after the discoverer, the founder, or one of the Great Ones in the mother country. The French and the Spaniards gave many satisfying names in the new

land, but their "St." and their "San" grow a little wearisome. Fortunately, no one with an infallible, expansive system of nomenclature was on the ground to fix such names as East River, East Branch, Middle River, North by North-west Fork, or the like. So we are blessed in having the Connecticut, the Ohio, the mighty "Father of Waters," and the "Big Muddy." It





A Mimic Cataract

is a boon for which we might be very grateful, in a world where Romance is dying.

Inconsistent as it may seem, all sons of Noah love flowing water. A bubbling, gushing mountain brook is a stream that flows from the heart of Nature to the soul of Man. But even the swirling old Missouri, famed among the nations, wallowing around among its mud-banks, possesses a fascination that all must feel. True, it flows muddy and yellow, choked with sand-bars, and the bluffs along its sides rise barren and steep. It lacks all the suggestiveness of purity

that belongs to the crystal "little rivers," so loved by wildwood wanderers. But it has a majesty and grandeur, like the mountains that give it birth. Walk beside the water's edge, let its influence then have complete sway, and you will find that a silence falls upon you, as if you were listening to a benediction. "It quiets a man down like saying his prayers." I have roamed beside streams that seemed an invitation to laughter. But the mood of the Big Muddy is an impressiveness approaching solemnity. Its deep, ceaseless song is an epitome of the anthem of the Universe.



A Quiet Pool

The awful sense that the River is crawling leaves you, if you stand close beside it and watch it swirling and eddying on its way. There is motion, swift as the waltz, but the rythm is slow and steady, so that one would not tire, though he sat and gazed all day. It flashes and



An Arbor Lodge

sparkles in the sunlight, and when the wind blows, as it still does occasionally in this rescued desert, the white-caps spin along right merrily. Yet on the whole the River seems a sedate old servant, bent on carrying out its homely mission, Seen from the bluffs of the Old Town, the

River is a wide, glassy highway that winds unwillingly on the Nebraska side, yoked by its enemy, the long bridge. If it were not for the bridge, might not the river riot at will over the wide valley? The Iowa bluffs in the distance are the daytime haunt of the purple and gray



A Middle-of-the-Roader

mists that creep out in the night to cover River and Town. Once the River sang its song nearer to their feet. Who knows but it may do so again, though riprappers work like beavers all winter long?

If you would appreciate the deeper meaning

of the Red man when he decreed that all who followed him should say "Big Muddy," you had best clamber about the bluffs as he did, and find your lookout unhindered by roads. Yet several highways leading from the Old Town will take you to views of magnificent sweep. Follow the road over Kearney Hill to the southeast, past pleasant, thrifty old farms; a delightfully rough byway,—would you always have smooth sailing?—leads through an uncanny willow swamp, and at length up the bluff by the back door. Neither brush nor camera can picture that view for you,—the wide, many-colored valley, level



In the Park

as a floor below you, with a silver ribbon winding
and turning in the midst between great ramparts.

winding away to the north and away to the
south as far as eye can see. What a mighty
course it runs, this strong old River that guard's
a Promised Land!

Merry rivulets trickle down through brush
tangles to join the rolling current; in the valleys
are quiet bayous where waters pause and placidly
mirror the sky in their depths. But the River
heeds them not. It never rests, it never sleeps.
Its beauty is the beauty of Power. It is kin to
the Ocean and to Eternity.





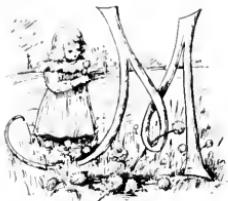
THE GREEN-CLAD GLORY

I have watched for your coming
With eager eyes,
O Robin red!
 Yet you showed surprise,
And flung up your head
 With a guilty air,
As if you would speak,
 But did not dare;
Lest your wondrous secret
 Might whisper through
The innocent note of a
 "How d'ye do?"

You set me a-dreaming
This May-March day,
Though trees are bare
 And the hills are gray.
Your unsung song
 Beats within my breast;
You need not tell,
 For I know the rest,—
There's a jubilant,
 Green-clad Glory that waits
With her fairy wand,
 At our Southland gates!



An Old Town Place of Trees



A R C H winds may scurry across hills and whoop through hollows, but the Robin, winged Mercury that he is, comes house-hunting betimes, and we, in implicit

confidence of the signal, begin to watch for the great transfiguration that he heralds. Then more than at any time else, should you possess a high lookout, from which to keep watch of this slow work of wonder. It is not enough to observe little patches of grass and a tree or two from your parlor window. If you would feast on the ever-new beauty, learn a lesson of the birds; hie thee to the hills and build thee a house on stilts. Those favored men who have always made their homes in the high places will perhaps not understand what a revelation a springtime above the trees brings to the unaccustomed. It is as if one had never known the majesty of trees before, no matter what altars of worship he may have built at their feet.

To keep watch above the Old Town on the River as Springtime woos and wins it is a precious experience. Yours is the privilege of discovering the first tinge of green under the frost that sparkles blue and white on the lawns; to you it is given to note the first freshening of color in cottonwood and birch, the delicate reddening of



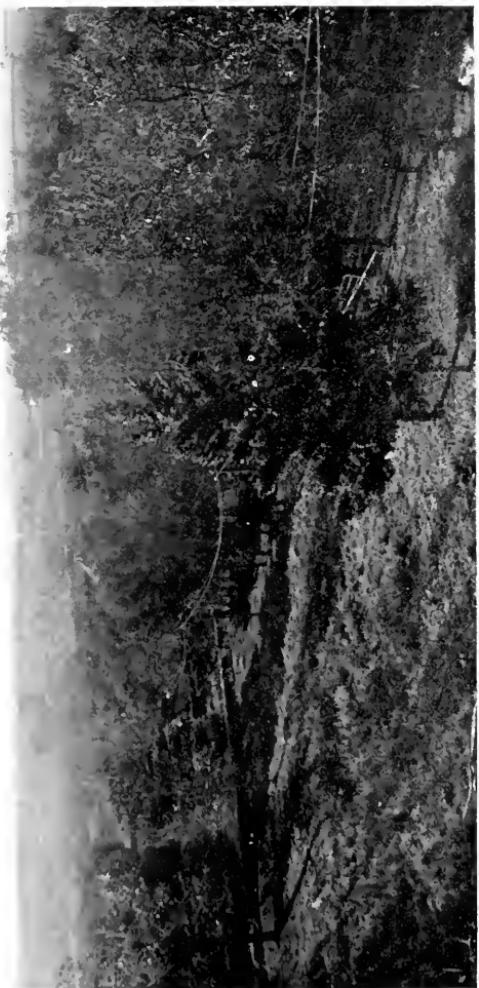
A Quiet Bayou

maples and elms. Day by day you may see the new life throbbing before you into beauty, the skies warming above you to milder hues, the strings of sparkles on the hillsides that rush to throw themselves into the quickened River, gladdening the heart of school-boy and girl; the River itself, silvery white and flashing as it flows broader and swifter than before; the greening of pastures and fields far and near; the white and pink of orchards in bloom;— Oh, it is not

everywhere that one can see such mass and tumult of beauty, even though the Springtime touches all earth with gladness.

Wonderful, balmy dream days.—Nebraska's best—come and go, the miracle of April passes, and in early May days you will find the Old Town arrayed as Solomon in all his glory might never be. After the winter snows, when it looked haggard and thin as it crouched beneath gaunt branches, right gladsome is the time when the Old Town comes to itself again, a noontide oak-tree for the earth, a restful vision for weary eyes. So it remains through blazing summer hours, while the corn grows tall and stately, till the day of harvest come.

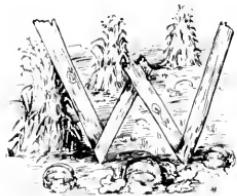




Sunset Hills

RED LEAVES . . .

How the hills blaze!
'Tis the blush of frost-kissed leaves,
The gold that wonderful summer days
Have stored in yellow sheaves.
But away in the shimmering air
The pageant of gold everywhere
Melts to a purple haze.



HEN THE great King Scyld had "departed to the All-Father's keeping," his comrades, as he himself had bidden, placed him in a "ring-stemmed vessel," clothed

in his most royal robes, with all his far-gathered jewels and treasure, his burnished weapons of warfare about him. "On his bosom sparkled many a jewel." Above him, "high under heaven," floated a gold-wrought banner. Thus in royal state the tide bore him away, while his well-loved hearth-companions stood on the shore and gazed in mournfulness.

It is in such splendor and richness that Summer slowly sails away, "trailing clouds of glory" as it departs. Never so gorgeously bedight



Like a Burning Bush

as in the hour of passing, never so dear as in the days when we watch it drift from us. Other Summers will come; but they may not be so fair, we think, and we shall be changed, or mayhap shall have floated away in our own lonely barge to a far-off sunset bourne. So to all men Autumn has ever been a season that brings a mournful message, arrayed though it may be in the glory of a King.

The Old Town is surely a favorite canvas for the great colorist. All hues and tints must be used, for the trees and grasses and trailing vines are of many varieties. However tenaciously they cling to their sober midsummer dress, there comes a day when they drink of a softly falling Autumn rain, and shiver a little in a breeze that whispers a strange story to them. Then

quickly is there a flash of color over all the scene,—scarlet and crimson, yellow and orange, wine-color and maroon, shaded browns and grays; new shoots on reluctant elms add the very color of spring; here is a tree whose leaves are half green, half gold, there a gray old trunk with a flame of woodbine creeping around and up to the highest twig; the grasses along the wayside are of unwonted brilliant hues, and every lone tree stands like a burning bush. Always the pines grow darker and darker as a background; and always the sky that arches above all,—whether blue or gray, harmonizes. A soft, shimmering veil of blue-white haze,—Nature's inimitable fashion,—graces all. In such days you should look out over the Old Town, and away to its Sunset hills, where it may be granted to you in the evening, to see the sun sink in a sea of gold, transfiguring earth and sky with un-named brightness.

There come gray, dripping days, when the bright tints are washed from the leaves, and the wind dances them away. A twilight of somber color covers all the landscape. The trees become bare, gaunt shapes, no longer a hiding place for the habitations of men. Still there is summer's deep green on many a grassy slope. Sunny November noontides bring enchantment, and on the lawns belated butterflies flit around dandelions lured out of hiding. But be sure

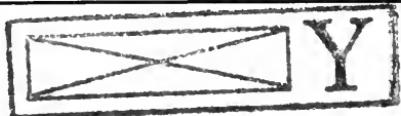
that finally a warning will sweep from the north,
the last fluffy dandelion will be blown, and the
roysterer Winter will have his turn with the Old
Town, the Hills, and the River.

The End



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